



# Brain Health

*You Can Make a Difference!*



Connecting You to Community Services



There are many lifestyle choices you can make to maintain a healthy body as you age. But what about the steps you can take to support a healthy brain as you grow older? This brochure will provide you with some information and guidance to help you make smart choices about your brain health with each passing year.



## Memory and Learning

As you grow older, you may notice differences in the way your mind works. You may have difficulty finding the correct words, multitasking or paying attention. The good news is that even if you have already noticed some of these changes, you are still able to learn new things, create new memories and improve vocabulary and language skills.

*Understanding Memory Loss (NIH)*

[www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers/publication/understanding-memory-loss](http://www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers/publication/understanding-memory-loss)

## Potential Threats to Brain Health

### Health Conditions

Some health conditions can negatively affect your brain. Heart disease, high blood pressure and diabetes can alter or damage blood vessels throughout your body, including the brain. Alzheimer's disease and other types of dementia also harm the brain. While no one knows how to prevent dementia, many approaches that are good for your health in other ways, including engaging in exercise and eating a healthy diet, are being tested.

# Action You Can Take to Help Protect Your Brain

## Take Charge

- Get recommended health screenings regularly.
- Manage health conditions, such as diabetes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol.
- Be sure to talk with your doctor or pharmacist about the medications you take and any possible side effects on memory, sleep and how your brain works.
- To learn more about how to move or exercise in a healthy way, ask your health care provider about your personal situation.



*NIH Senior Health* [nihseniorhealth.gov/](http://nihseniorhealth.gov/)

*Safe Use of Medicines* (NIH)

[www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/safe-use-medicines/introduction](http://www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/safe-use-medicines/introduction)

*Preventing Alzheimer's Disease: What Do We Know?* (NIH)

[www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers/publication/preventing-alzheimers-disease/introduction](http://www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers/publication/preventing-alzheimers-disease/introduction)

## Eat Right

Try to maintain a balanced diet of fruits and vegetables, whole grains, lean meats (including fish and poultry) and low-fat or non-fat dairy products. Monitor your intake of solid fat, sugar and salt, and eat proper portion sizes.

*What's on Your Plate:*

*Smart Food Choices for Healthy Aging* (NIH)

[www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/whats-your-plate](http://www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/whats-your-plate)



## Potential Threats to Brain Health

### Medicines

Some medications and certain combinations of drugs can affect your thinking and the way your brain works. Older adults taking medications should be particularly careful when consuming alcohol, as drugs may interact negatively with it.

### Alcohol

Drinking alcohol can slow or impair communication among your brain cells. This can cause slurred speech, a fuzzy memory, drowsiness and dizziness; it can also lead to long-term difficulties with your balance, memory, coordination and body temperature.

## Get Moving

Being physically active may help reduce the risk of conditions that can harm brain health, such as diabetes, heart disease, depression and stroke; it may also help improve connections among your brain cells. Older adults should get at least 150 minutes of exercise each week.



*Go4Life* (NIH) [go4life.nia.nih.gov/](http://go4life.nia.nih.gov/)

## Drink Moderately, If At All

Staying away from alcohol can reverse some negative changes related to brain health.

*Alcohol Use and Older Adults* (NIH)

[www.nihseniorhealth.gov/alcoholuse/alcoholandaging/01.html](http://www.nihseniorhealth.gov/alcoholuse/alcoholandaging/01.html)

## Don't Smoke

Quitting smoking at any age will be beneficial to the health of your mind and body. Non-smokers have a lower risk of heart attacks, stroke and lung diseases, as well as increased blood circulation.

*Smoking: It's Never too Late to Stop* (NIH)

[www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/smoking](http://www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/smoking)

Call a quit line at 1-800-QUIT-NOW  
(1-800-784-8669)



## Potential Threats to Brain Health

### Smoking

The risks associated with smoking are heart attacks, stroke and lung disease.

### Brain Injury

Older adults are at higher risk of falling and other accidents that can cause brain injury.

# Be Safe

To reduce the risk of falling, exercise to improve balance and coordination, take a falls prevention class, and make your home safer.

# Think and Connect

Keep your mind active by doing mentally stimulating activities like reading, playing games, learning new things, teaching or taking a class and being social. Older adults who remain active and engaged with others by doing activities like volunteering report being happier and healthier overall.



*Participating in Activities You Enjoy—More than Just Fun and Games* (NIH)  
[www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/participating-activities-you-enjoy](http://www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/participating-activities-you-enjoy)

Senior Corps (Corporation for National and Community Service)  
[www.nationalservice.gov/programs/senior-corps](http://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/senior-corps)

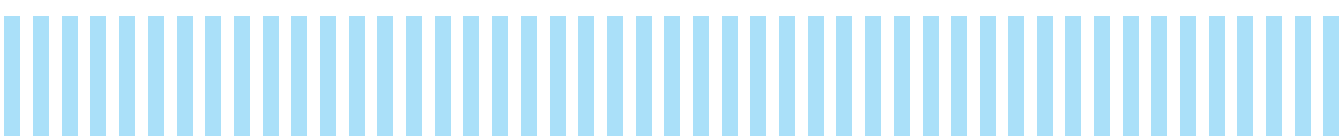
VolunteerMatch  
[www.volunteermatch.org](http://www.volunteermatch.org)

Experience Corps (AARP)  
[www.aarp.org/experience-corps](http://www.aarp.org/experience-corps)

# Taking the First Step

You can start to support your brain health with some small, first steps and build from there.

- Begin an exercise routine, such as a daily walk, with the goal of increasing the amount of time and speed.
- Add an extra serving of fruit and vegetables each day.
- Make an appointment for a health screening or a physical exam.
- Seek out volunteer opportunities that interest you.
- Sign up for a class or program at your community college or community center.



# Visit Your Local Area Agency on Aging

There is an Area Agency on Aging (AAA) in virtually every community in America and so chances are, there is one near you. AAAs provide a welcoming environment for older adults and caregivers interested in learning about a range of services from meals, transportation and in-home care to volunteer opportunities and classes to keep them healthy and engaged in their community.



Connecting You to Community Services

**To learn more about the AAA  
in your area, call the Eldercare  
Locator at 800.677.1116 or  
visit [www.eldercare.gov](http://www.eldercare.gov) to get  
connected today.**



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The Call Center (800.677.1116) is open five days a week from 9:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. ET and serves as an essential, trusted gateway to help older adults, caregivers and aging/health professionals navigate the maze of aging programs and services, as well as to assist them in identifying and accessing the resources that match their needs best.

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